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November 2, 1962

TO:

FROM: S/P - W. W. Rostow

Subject: Planning Group Meeting, Tuesday,
November 6, 1962

The attached draft paper was prepared by Mr. Rowen and Colonel Armstrong of DOD. This paper is presented as the basis for a more general discussion at our meeting on Tuesday, November 6.

Attachment:

Draft Paper entitled:
"Some Lessons From the
First Two Weeks of the
Cuban Crisis" dated
November 1, 1962.

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By MFC NARS, Date 7/29/76

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Cuba

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Held for
Tue Nov. 6

of 20 copies.

SOME LESSONS FROM THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE CUBAN CRISIS

1. Soviet Objectives

We cannot know how these were weighed in the balance but three objectives of the Soviet nuclear buildup in Cuba seem evident:

- a. To step up rapidly the Soviet ability to deliver nuclear weapons against the U. S. and especially against our strategic forces, including our command and control capability.
- b. To deter a U. S. attack on Cuba.
- c. To increase Soviet bargaining position.
- d. To regain credibility for earlier claims that the balance of forces had shifted in favor of the Soviets, or at least, to demonstrate that the U. S. was too indecisive, too cautious, or too terrified of nuclear war to exploit even local superiority backed up by strategic superiority to respond effectively to a major Soviet Union provocation.

2. Soviet Reactions.

In a military confrontation with the U. S., the Soviets clearly accepted the notion of limited conflict. They operated throughout under certain self-imposed restrictions, apparently arising primarily from their nuclear concerns. Although the initial Soviet move that created the situation was bold, when confronted by strong U. S. reaction the Soviets were thereafter more cautious. The outcome showed that other considerations may outweigh in the Soviet mind the need to appear constantly successful.

3. Soviet Threat

Soviet willingness to use military means in pursuit of perceived interests in the main East-West struggle, as distinct from the politico-

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economic-paramilitary contest for control of underdeveloped areas, became vividly clear.

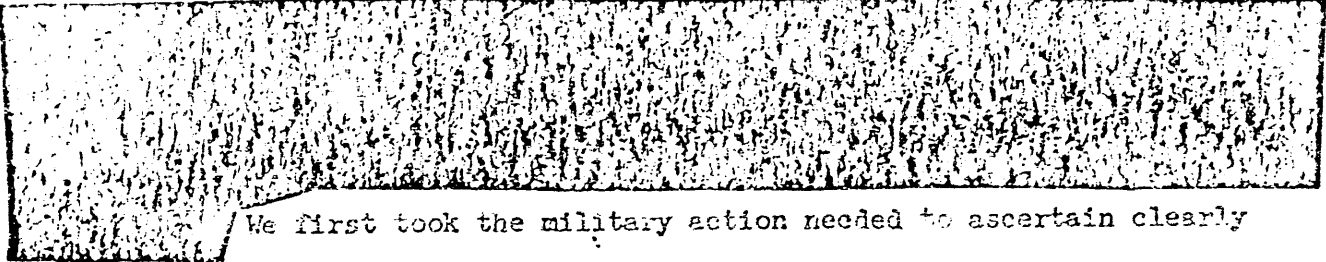
4. How Far the Nuclear Writ Runs

The Soviets were not deterred from military entry into Cuba by U. S. nuclear superiority overall and enormous local superiority. This shows that local military capability, even superiority is not enough, any more than a nuclear threat, to deter the Soviets from a provocative test of U. S. will and resolution. Our local, non-nuclear superiority was vital in meeting this test but only after a convincing demonstration of our will to use it.

5. Validation of the Nuclear Deterrent

It may have been their concern over the consequences of nuclear conflict that led to Soviet withdrawal. If so, this concern, however, was activated by U. S. application of non-nuclear pressures of an integrated politico-military character, backed up by an alerted SAC. When limited force had already been applied, and when it had become unmistakable that the U. S. was on the point of taking non-nuclear combatant action, the Soviet decision to withdraw occurred. But the Soviets may have had a simpler concern: the avoidance of having their forces in Cuba destroyed.

6. Analogy with Berlin Strategy:


We first took the military action needed to ascertain clearly the existence of a threat to our vital interests. We then began a program of ascending political pressures against a background of military preparations, with the aim not of conquest but of restoration of our vital interests intact.

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Our determination to proceed so far as was necessary through a chain of expanding non-nuclear action and eventually nuclear action was clearly visible throughout, because our preparations for these actions were realistically in train.

7. Politico-Military Inseparability

At no stage in the operation as executed, nor in the operations foreseen ahead, did the problem seem wholly political or wholly military. Advisors and decision-makers at the seat of government, whether diplomats, military men, or political officials, at all points found it essential to take into account factors which might ordinarily seem beyond their individual spheres of cognizance. It was not possible to predict at what point a political detail required change in minor military details normally left to be decided in the field; similarly, military detail at unexpected times necessarily altered political decisions and actions, large and small. In the basic policy decisions at high levels, there was complete interdependence of military and political aspects. The problem itself could not be broken down into political and military components, so indivisibly were these merged. The selection of the objective was again a combined problem. Only out of the interplay of military capabilities and limitations with the political elements of the setting could courses of action be set up and choices made.

8. Alliance Indivisibility

The defense of the Alliance is not geographically divisible. Although the Caribbean is outside the NATO area, Soviet action there affected the U. S. not only as homeland but also as Alliance arsenal. The U. S. felt keenly its responsibility as custodian of Alliance nuclear deterrent strength,

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and the US was acutely aware of the problem of Berlin repercussions in deciding on its actions. The Soviets attempted to connect the problem with NATO bases in Turkey. Owing to the outcome of what superficially appeared to be only a Soviet-US confrontation in Cuba, there may emerge possibilities for progress toward objectives of the Alliance and its members in regard to such matters as arms control, nuclear diffusion, and Berlin.

9. Control

So swiftly developing and complex a problem demanded continuous, intense central control. Even with the extraordinarily complete and high quality information available to the US, decisions and their translation into action at the pace required to sustain command of the situation were difficult enough with centralized control. The US wanted widespread consultation but recognized from the outset that to seek it would impede and possibly frustrate the conduct of the action. Fortunately, enough prior discussion and inter-governmental contact through Alliance and other forums had occurred that the US felt aware of the general thrust of its Allies' views even in this unprecedented situation. The US was equipped to assess somewhat the acceptability to its Allies of various courses of action. To apply graduated, menacing pressure with the least risk of uncontrollability clearly required one firm hand on the valve wheel.

10. There has been a spontaneous emergence of ad hoc arms control proposals from many sources. There have also been pressures, internal and external for their hasty implementation unsupported by prior planning and analysis. For example, the lack of preparations for implementing rapidly even temporary inspection arrangements including technically competent neutral observers with some modern equipment.

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11. Secrecy

It has been shown possible to conduct over a period of at least a week an intensive analytic and planning activity without having its nature revealed in the press. Furthermore, judging from the confusion produced in Moscow by the President's speech of 22 October, it would appear that Soviet intelligence was surprised. In the climatic stages of the planning, large numbers of persons and many widely dispersed locations were involved, yet security still remained very tight. The effect of this was to deny to the Soviets any opportunity for political pre-emption, as by announcing commitments or conditions prior to the President's speech. Such actions by the Soviets, putting us in the position of reacting rather than initiating, not ^{would have} only/restricted US freedom of action, but also ^{would have} substantially changed the effect produced on Allied government positions and public opinion.

12. Power at Sea

The ease with which the US was able to apply its will on the high seas, little hampered by considerations of security against enemy action, shows vividly how immense is our superiority at sea. While this is especially so in the Caribbean, within range of US-based aircraft, anywhere except in waters subject to Soviet-based air control our naval superiority is very pronounced indeed. US manipulation of a few among the great many available non-nuclear naval activities, in concert with a carefully managed program of political activities, forced the Soviets into a reactive condition. Our power at sea, used not to defeat enemy sea forces but to apply politico-military pressures, permitted us to retain the initiative and to succeed.

13. The Importance of Communications

Because of the speed with which military force may be used at great

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range and because some information moves with great speed, it is necessary that all information of importance to national decisions also move with great speed. Speed depends upon geography and the length of the chain of command, and it is not always possible to discern which among a multitude of information will be relevant at the national level. Problems of this sort are made worse if there is uncertainty as to the concerns of superiors.



14. Information for Decision-Makers

While it is not a cardinal necessity that all advisors whom the President consults be possessed exactly of uniform information, it is, on the other hand, highly undesirable for their advice to diverge merely because some lack certain key facts. Whether this actually ever occurred in the Cuban operation is not so significant as the fact that it was certainly possible. The mechanical handling of factual data is susceptible of much improvement, particularly at the boundary where diplomatic and military data enter the political area. Improvements here could prevent future troubles, possibly serious ones.

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